

Cali Cleantech Investment, Jobs Leapfrog U.S.

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If the rest of the country had followed California's lead in supporting clean energy, improving efficiency, and creating green jobs, it might not be in the economic doldrums it's in today. That's the assertion made by venture capitalist F. Noel Perry, founder of the nonprofit policy group Next 10, which has just released a new report on how energy efficiency and clean technology has provided stimulus for California's economy. "If California had not moved as forcefully to decrease energy consumption over the last three decades, we would be in a much more precarious economic position right now," he said in an announcement today. "Imagine where the country could be if it were as efficient as California."

Lest our imaginations run wild, let's look at the hard facts. As we've noted before, clean technology investment hit a record \$3.3 billion last year. According to the Next 10 report, the California Green Innovation Index, California registered more patents for clean technologies than any other state from 2002 to 2007. Grid-connected solar capacity grew by 41 percent from 2006 to 2007, contributing to a green jobs-creation rate that's increasing 10 times faster than total job growth. (Data from 2008, when more than 10 solar thermal companies geared up for major projects in the Mojave Desert, might show even more growth.)

Another factor in the creation of 1.5 million jobs: California residents and companies with lower energy bills had cash to spend on other things.

Given that President Barack Obama's plan for reviving the U.S. economy centers on a Green New Deal, California's numbers would appear to make it a model for the nation. Crucially, the state's GDP has continued to grow while per-capita emissions have gone down (total emissions, while rising, have slowed in recent years).

But California has some of its own catching up to do — especially when it comes to fuel economy. According to Next 10, the state has more alt-fuel vehicle registrations than any other state, and the Los Angeles, San Francisco and Sacramento metropolitan areas rank among the top ten markets for hybrids. Yet behind all those shiny new cars are highways choked with gas guzzlers: The most recent data shows California's average fuel economy (19.9 mpg) lagging behind the U.S. as a whole (20.1 mpg). President Obama's push for the EPA to let California enforce tighter fuel economy standards, then, couldn't have come too soon.